

‘ROMEO AND JULIET’  
AS AN  
EXPERIMENTAL TRAGEDY

by  
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ANNUAL SHAKESPEARE LECTURE  
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By H. B. CHARLTON

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I BEGIN by asking a question to which I have no full answer. It has been asked a thousand times before, and answered in a hundred ways. It is this. Whence springs the pleasure which mortals find in tragic drama? Pleasure, even rapture, it undoubtedly is; yet it comes ostensibly from the show of grief. The more moving the sorrow, the deeper the joy. Is this another phase of the incomprehensible contradictions of human nature, a 'miserable madness', as St. Augustine felt his own liking for tragedy to be? Is there no explanation between the sadist's delight in another's afflictions and the masochist's satisfaction in his own sufferings?

Both these extreme and easy answers, sadist or masochist, are repellent to human sentiment. They lack what Aristotle called τὸ φιλόπρωπον. So, to retain its self-respect, the human mind must persist in exploring other possibilities. Nor need it seek far for a starting-point. Simple, untutored, unconstrained intuition functions 'philanthropically', in Aristotle's sense, at the spectacle of tragic drama; moreover, its spontaneous reactions correspond closely with deliberate, reasoned, and cultured estimates of values in the poetic art of tragedy. It protests instinctively against the display, as if for its pleasure, of calamities gratuitously and arbitrarily contrived by those to whom, as to the tragic poets, it turns for their particular pleasure. Otherwise, attendance at a tragic play could only be furtive and incognito. For what seems to happen, at a cursory glance, is this. The curtain rises; the audience is introduced to the hero, of whom hitherto it is ignorant and towards whom



therefore it is indifferent. But the dramatist uses his two hours' traffic deftly, exciting admiration or love for his hero. Then, remembering that he advertised a tragedy, he slinks up behind his hero and stretches him out dead, just when his audience has been fully aroused to a sense of awe and respect, and even of reverence and love, for that hero. Superficially, it would seem that a tragic audience finds pleasure in maimings and death, and that its pleasure is greatly enhanced when the victim to be mangled and destroyed is one whom it respects, admires, and loves. But if this is a true diagnosis, then the Romans who flocked to Nero's circus to see Christians torn by lions were benevolent moral beings compared with a modern audience of tragedy; for they at least thought that Christians were enemies of the State and of the gods. Clearly, the diagnosis is not true; and the convincing proof is the outcry of the woman in the gallery as, awestruck, she watches Romeo in the Capulet tomb lifting poison to his lips in the belief that Juliet is dead. 'Stop! Wait a minute!' she is alleged to have shouted. Her cry justifies the 'philanthropy' of human nature. It also suggests primary grounds of criticism in tragedy. It is an intuitive judgement of what tragedy must be, and of what *Romeo and Juliet* apparently is not.

Somehow or in some respects *Romeo and Juliet* fails to fulfil the function of tragedy, or rather it gives less of the pleasure peculiar to tragedy than do Shakespeare's greater tragic plays. The scope of the present lecture is to consider what pleasure *Romeo and Juliet* seeks to provide, and to try to estimate wherein such pleasure falls short of complete tragic satisfaction. The first stage of the inquiry will be directed to discover what views on the condition of tragic pleasure were held by critics concerned with this question in the century when Europe was experimenting with the foundation of modern tragedy, the century of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

In the main, they are the critics who were expounding Aristotle's περί ποιητικῆς. Aristotle has a number of

remarks about the pleasure of poetry in general and of tragedy in particular. But his interpreters, finding no explicitly elaborated doctrine in his text, built up their own opinions on passages dispersed through his *Poetics*. For our special purpose, there were his remarks on κάθαρσις as the tragic function, on τὸ φιλόνητον as a condition of the tragic effect, and on τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον 'the probable or the necessary' as the qualities of the tragic action. Katharsis, as most physiological, concerns us least, since it appears to assert little more than that the ordered purging of emotions, which by their own nature are most apt to disturb the established organism of personality, is likely to create an almost physical sense of controlled well-being. If the pleasure of katharsis is most immediately physiological, that consequent on τὸ φιλόνητον leans expressly to the moral; indeed, Butcher's interpretation makes Aristotle demand that tragedy shall satisfy the 'moral sense'. There is almost a danger of taking Aristotle to pronounce for poetic justice. But τὸ φιλόνητον is something deeper and vaguer, wider and more primary, than what the 'moral sense' normally implies. Victorius gives the usual sixteenth-century translation, *gratum hominibus*, which he then glosses 'quod gratum esse possit hominibus et ejus generis quod acceptum est humanae naturae capitque animos mortalium'.<sup>1</sup> It is wellnigh the sort of comprehensive gratification to which Castelvetro, discussing the pleasure of tragedy, gives the name *compiacimento*.

But it is another Aristotelian topic which comes most pertinently to our present purpose. At least half a dozen times Aristotle demands that the matter of tragedy should be κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον, 'probable or necessary'. The most crucial case is his distinction between the function of the poet and that of the historian: 'it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen, what is possible according to the law of probability

<sup>1</sup> P. Victorius, *Commentarii in Primum Librum Aristotelis de Arte Poetarum*, 1560, p. 121.

or necessity.<sup>1</sup> His remarks roused his sixteenth-century commentators to voluminous exposition. How, they asked, did Aristotle discriminate between the probable, the possible, the true and the false, the verisimile and the necessary, between things as they ought to happen and things as they had happened? There was, of course, the controlling prescription that poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular, and there was Agathon's somewhat question-begging *mot*:<sup>2</sup> 'it is probable', he says, 'that many things should happen contrary to probability.' But within the enormous display of erudition there was a general recognition that the problem of the 'possibility' of tragic action involved something fundamental to the nature of tragedy. One of the astutest of the Renaissance critics seized on it as the primary problem:<sup>3</sup> 'È da sapere, che questa possibilità richiesta alla favola è da più assai che non è ciascuna dell' altre sette cose richieste alla favola per se, e che non sono anchora tutte insieme conciosia cosa che essa sia come sustantia della favola, e l'altre come accidenti, o essa sia come materia, la quale è prima di natura, e dall' altre tutte è seguita, ed a lei si rapportano.'

Castelvetro's 'possibility to happen' corresponds to Aristotle's τὰ Δυνάτα. To be possible in this sense the matter must be either probable (*verisimile*) or necessary. In general, the *verisimile* and the necessary were taken to be alternate or overlapping modes of possibility. Robortelli, for instance, took 'necessity' as something absolutely in things themselves; it amounted therefore to 'real' or 'true' and possessed the ultimacy of reality:<sup>4</sup> 'quamvis fortasse ex necessario nihil fingatur, ex eo enim pendent actiones verae.' But others, and especially Piccolomini, contested this interpretation: 'la necessità, di cui fà mentione Aristotele in molti luoghi, così in proposito della favola, come dei

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, Butcher's translation, ix. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xviii. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Castelvetro, *Poetica d'Aristotile*, ed. 1576, p. 184.

<sup>4</sup> Robortelli, *In Librum Aristotelis de Arte Poetica Explicationes*, 1548, p. 87.

costumi, e della sententia non s'hà da intender quella, ch'è posta nelle cose, ch'assolutamente necessarie sono; ma di quella che si truova nel conseguimento di una cosa da un' altra.<sup>1</sup> Thus Piccolomini's notion of the necessary as the logical, the causally consequential, nearly impinges on what other commentators, Robortelli for instance, took the other Aristotelian requirement τὸ εἰκὸς to mean; i.e. that which in the general and popular mind is likely.<sup>2</sup> Broadly speaking, the sixteenth century took τὸ εἰκὸς to be 'the likely', and τὸ ἀναγκαῖον to be 'the certain'. But likelihood may be estimated by popular or by informed opinion, and certainty may seem to be proved by actual occurrence or by expert demonstration. Hence the confusion. But the difficulty is not really verbal; it is inherent in nature and in what we call experience and knowledge. ἀνάγκη may in general be necessity as a law of nature; but τὸ ἀναγκαῖον is either the physically or the morally or the intellectually necessary. Aristotle's 'necessity' seems generally to refer to the nexus of events in sequence;<sup>3</sup> but even in Aristotle the word cannot divest itself of implications from a more primitive apprehension of reality. The probable and the necessary come close together till the two stipulations almost merge; propositions about the nature of things are statements of the way things are apprehended. 'Necessity', ἀνάγκη, is a name for something felt to be an ultimate compulsion, a power ordaining inevitably the nature of what is, and controlling inevitably the sequence of what becomes. As Aristotle uses it, it is a scientific or metaphysical term for that *ultima ratio* of tragedy which in a more theological terminology of other epochs may be

<sup>1</sup> A. Piccolomini, *Annotationi nel libro della Poetica d'Aristotele*, 1575, p. 138 (misprinted 158).

<sup>2</sup> Robortelli, loc. cit., p. 87, allows matters 'praeter naturam', if 'receptae iam sunt in opinionem vulgi'. Riccoboni, *Poetica Aristotelis*, 1587, p. 43, puts it succinctly: proper material may be drawn 'ex vulgari opinione . . . quod satis est poetis, qui ad popularem se accommodant opinionem'.

<sup>3</sup> *Poetics* (Butcher), especially x. 3.

thought of as 'fate' or 'destiny'. When Aristotle demanded that the plot of tragedy should conform to necessity, and so sweep to its inevitable though tragic ending, he was lifting tragedy out of arbitrary theatrical sensationalism. He was demanding that it should provide higher pleasure, a glimpse into the nature of things, a deeper knowledge of reality. The main pleasure of tragedy was to be found in the absolute imaginative (and for the time being, therefore, intellectual) conviction with which an audience accepted the portrayal of the hero's destiny as the necessary outcome of the ultimate nature of the spiritual universe. The essential condition of tragic pleasure was an overwhelming sense of inevitability in the tragic action.

To what extent is this pleasure provided by Shakespeare's earlier tragedies? (By earlier, I mean here *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard III*, and *Richard II*, all of which I take to be prior to *Romeo and Juliet*.) I shall be forgiven, I hope, for expressing my opinion on this matter in what must appear to be a dogmatic way; this is neither the time nor the place for putting forward an argued justification of my views about these earlier plays. I simply record my findings here as a prelude to formulating the problem of *Romeo and Juliet*.

*Titus Andronicus* is tragedy in the raw, a mere poetic presentation of scenes of horror with appropriate neo-Senecan decorations. It is a spectacle for the eye devised to harry the nerves. It has nothing for the mind; indeed, to forestall intellectual and imaginative protest, it rains such frequent blows of atrocity on our consciousness that the mind must be stunned into torpor. It has therefore no coherence beyond that of the external succession of events; and this succession is conditioned solely by the arbitrary will of those who enact its deeds. It lacks ultimate inevitability entirely.

*Richard III* shows vast progress. Character is beginning to be deployed as the smith of fortune. But there is a fundamental flaw in the chain of circumstances fashioned

to display the power of character to secure the sense of inevitability. Shakespeare's portrayal of Richard rising from might to might as he forces his personality on men and on things is an impressive and compelling representation of human action. Then, too, his Richard, falling gradually from success to defeat, is a striking exhibition of credible psychology. But the weak link is the turning-point. There is no compelling momentum in the play itself to determine the change of fortune. Shakespeare kills his hero by borrowing a weapon from his audience. Richard dies because he is a villain: the audience connives at his death because it believes that the wages of sin is death. The truth of this general belief about the moral order is irrelevant: the point is that, unless a poet be merely a craftsman, great tragedy does not merely exemplify general views. It reveals their truth; it provides, not an illustration of what is generally held to be true, it produces the conviction that this or that must be true. There is nothing within the play of *Richard III* to compel Richard's fate. But the joy of seeing destiny play policeman and executioner in the interests of virtue easily persuades an audience to lend the author handcuffs and axe to assist in the good work. Again, then, the conviction of ultimate inevitability is lacking.

*Richard II* tries other measures. As king and as man Richard is doubtless bad in many ways. But his badness is not displayed as the cause of his ruin. Both are the outcome of his weakness. Weakness of any kind is, in effect, a liability to break, a certainty, indeed, that under tension the break must come. So, choosing a weak protagonist, the dramatist would appear to guarantee the inevitability of downfall. But for the purposes of tragedy the apparent solution proves spurious. Such inevitability lacks momentousness; and not even the wealth of poetic pathos in which Shakespeare dresses his hero can lift this manner of inevitability out of the common round of sublunary things into the region of an eternal law of the spirit.

So, reviewing these three tragedies, one may well ask

how at all the modern world was to build the foundation of its tragedy. Its position was new. A Greek could invoke Nemesis as an ultimate power of his world-order and a convincing instrument of tragic inevitability: for Nemesis, guarding the moral order, was no policeman like the moral squad of *Richard III*, formally fitting the calculated punishment to a crime for which, as like as not, the criminal, in the experience of the audience, might escape scot-free. The new world-order established by Christianity completely changed the assumptions of tragedy, even if it did not entirely destroy them. It took the sting from death, and despoiled the grave of its victory. The spell by which the mysteries of personality excited Renaissance speculation suggested the first attempts to find the new tragic fact of human existence; dramatists began to cast about for tragic compulsion in the soul of man rather than in the mind of God. But it was hard to give the sense of ultimacy to an inevitability confined to such limits. Yet that was the problem of modern tragedy.

The establishment of modern tragedy, as is well known, was the work of sixteenth-century Italians.<sup>1</sup> Their method was to look to the ancients for guidance; and at first, with a finer sense of critical valuation than of creative needs, they chose the Greeks as their masters. But the Hellenistic tragedies of the early sixteenth century written by Italians like Trissino, Rucellai, Martelli, and Pazzi, were still-born. It was not until towards the middle of the century that Cinthio by precept and practice, but by precept much more than by practice, gave a new direction to the venture. In many major ways his direct injunction was much more immediately useful than finally sound; but he built the foundations of tragedy for modern Europe.

Cinthio's reforms were many. In effect, they were an

<sup>1</sup> See the Introduction (on Senecan tragedy in sixteenth-century Europe) which, perhaps unwisely, I buried eighteen years ago in an edition (with L. E. Kastner) of *The Poetical Works of Sir William Alexander* (Manchester University Press, 1921).

adaptation of Seneca, or rather of what he took Seneca's purposes to be, to the immediate needs of Cinthio's contemporary theatre. His own object he declared to be *servire l'età, a gli spettatori*. Tragedy must grip its audience. It must therefore reflect a range of experience and base itself on a system of values felt by its audience to be real. Many of his proposals are the direct outcome of this general principle, and one or two of them are especially pertinent to our argument. For instance, tragedy must no longer rely mainly for its material on ancient mythology nor on accredited history; for these depict a world which may have lost urgent contact with a modern audience's sense of life. The best plots for modern tragedy will be found in modern fiction. For modern fiction is the mythology of to-day. It is the corpus of story through which the world appears as it seems to be to living men; it mirrors accepted codes of conduct, displays the particular manner of contemporary consciousness, and adopts the current assumptions of human values. Let the dramatist, therefore, draw his plots from the novelists. An inevitable consequence follows from this. There is nothing in which the outlook on life of the ancient classical world is so different from that of the post-Christian world than in their apprehension of the human and spiritual significance of the love of man for woman. Love had become for the modern world the all-engrossing interest and often its supreme experience. Modern fiction turns almost exclusively on love. So when dramatists took their tales from the novelists, they took over love as the main theme of their plays. Seven of Cinthio's nine plays take their plots from novels (most of them from his own series, the *Hecatommithi*); the other two are 'classical', but are two of the great classical love stories, *Dido* and *Cleopatra*. Jason de Nores, a much more conservatively Aristotelian expositor than his contemporary Cinthio, to exemplify the form which the most perfect tragedy must take, constructs the plot for it from one of Boccaccio's tales.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jason de Nores, *Poetica*, 1588, p. 48.



Whether by direct influence or by mere force of circumstance, Cinthio's practice prevailed. Sixteenth-century tragedy found rich material in the novels. But the traditionalists were perpetually reminding the innovators that tragedy always had had and always must have an historical hero. 'In tragoedia reges, principes, ex urbibus, arcibus, castris.'<sup>1</sup> No one would accept a hero as great unless his memory were preserved in the historian's pages. 'C'est l'histoire qui persuade avec empire', as Corneille put it. Shakespeare, an eager and humble apprentice, naturally followed traditional custom. *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard III*, and *Richard II* belong in the main to the conventional pattern. They deal with historical material. Their heroes are of high rank and potent in determining the destiny of nations. The plot is never mainly a lovers' story, though a love-intrigue intrudes sporadically here and there within the major theme. But somehow the prescriptions had not produced the expected result. There was something unsatisfying in these plays as divinations of man's tragic lot. And so the conventions were jettisoned by *Romeo and Juliet*.

The plot of *Romeo and Juliet* is pure fiction. Shakespeare took it from Arthur Broke's poem, the *Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet* (1562). Shakespeare knew from Broke's title-page that the tale was taken from an Italian novelist, 'written first in Italian by Bandell'. He knew, too, what sort of novels Bandello wrote, for Painter had retold them in his *Palace of Pleasure* (1567). They were clear fictions.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Julius Caesar Scaliger, *Poeticæ Libri Septem*, 1561 (ed. 1617, p. 25).

<sup>2</sup> Bandello makes no attempt to disguise the fiction. His remark in the dedicatory letter that the tale was told as 'una pietosa istoria che in Verona al tempo del signor Bartolomeo Scala avvenne', his mention of the historical della Scala, and his citing of the verses inscribed on the tomb of the lovers, are his only concessions to the traditional tale-teller's verisimilitude which seeks to pass off fiction as history. His French translator, Boaistuau, enlarges the claims for historicity; and these larger claims appear in Painter's translation which is from the French and not the Italian. But Shakespeare's source, his only source

Moreover the hero and the heroine, Romeo and Juliet, had none of the pomp of historic circumstance about them; they were socially of the minor aristocracy who were to stock Shakespeare's comedies, and their only political significance was an adventitious role in the civic disturbance of a small city-state.<sup>1</sup> Romeo and Juliet were in effect just a boy and a girl in a novel; and even so, they had no claim to the world's attention except through their passion and their fate.

To choose such folk for tragedy was aesthetically well-nigh an anarchist's gesture. *Romeo and Juliet* is indeed an almost wildly experimental tragedy.<sup>2</sup> Whether Shakespeare so far as I can judge, was Broke; and in Broke there is even less pretence of historicity than in Bandello. There is nothing but the mere naming of Escalus (who would be an historical della Scala to few readers) and one only of the three thousand lines which make up his poem, that one too the last but four in the poem, merely records that 'even at this day the tombe is to be seene'.

<sup>1</sup> When the Romeo and Juliet story was first told by Masuccio, its protagonists were specifically bourgeois, son and daughter of merchants. But their state had been somewhat exalted by Porto before Bandello told the tale in its third main form. In Bandello they belong to a sort of local aristocracy of wealth, the ennobled gentry of a small duchy. Boaistuau promotes them to a higher social rank, mainly by increasing the parade of their domestic circumstance and the gold-lace of their domestic retinue. For instance, Bandello names Juliet's nurse simply as 'una sua vecchia che nodrita l'aveva'; in the French she is 'une vieille dame d'honneur', 'sa nourrice qui couchoit en sa chambre et lui servoit de femme d'honneur'. Bandello's Juliet lives in a *casa*, Boaistuau's in a *palais*. For Juliet's intended marriage with Paris, Bandello merely records 'Giulietta fu pomposamente di ricche vestimenta e di gioie messa in ordine'; Boaistuau knows that marriages are great social occasions: 'les nopces, ausquelles la mere de Julliette avoit si bien pourveu qu'il ne restoit rien de ce qui appartenoit à la magnificence et grandeur de leur maison (fo. 54v.)'.

<sup>2</sup> This is not to claim that such an attempt was novel outside Italy. There are well-known records of a French play written about 1560 by an Italian, Cosimo la Gamba (Cosme la Gambe dit Chasteauvieux), *Roméo et Juliette*, and based on Bandello. This may have been the original of a play seen by Broke just before 1562, if his sentence in the preface to his poem—'Though I saw the same argument lately set

was deliberately anarchic, whether he was consciously dissatisfied with his earlier tragic plays, are matters entirely conjectural and entirely insignificant; for an artist's inspiration is generally deep below the levels of fully conscious motive. But Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has come down to us with a physical feature attached to it which for Shakespearian tragedy is unique. It has a prologue. In Quarto 1 this appears as twelve lines (obviously the debris of a sonnet) printed separately and distinctly as a prologue. In Quarto 2 the twelve lines are enlarged to the proper fourteen; and though typographically the sonnet appears on an initial and separate page as a prologue, it has a stage direction, *Chorus*, to indicate its integrity with the play. The Folio has neither one nor the other. But in Quarto 2 and in the Folio, though not in Quarto 1, *Chorus* is allowed another sonnet between Acts 1 and II (as they are now commonly divided). This second chorus, however, seems a mere dead form: it is a colourless summary of action to come; and after this second, it makes no further appearance. But the first chorus, the prologue, is different. As Quarto 2 appears to have as much formal authenticity as attaches to any Shakespearian quarto, it is legitimate to ask why the prologue got into print.

It is fairly certain that every Elizabethan play had its prologue. Given the physical conditions of the Elizabethan popular stage, a prologue did the work which an orchestra, the dimming of lights, and the rising of the front curtain do in a modern theatre. It secured the proper settling of the audience and the quiet necessary for the start of the play. Sometimes, and especially in the earlier Senecan plays, a presiding genius of Revenge, a Ghost, might well serve as prologue-chorus. But in the main, a prologue did not belong to the play as a piece of drama; it was merely part

forth on stage'—is to be taken literally. And of course, not a few English tragedies on novelists' themes had been written before Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet*. But for Shakespeare the plan was novel and revolutionary.

of the physical machinery of the theatre. Of Shakespeare's prologues, only three are preserved: the prologue to *Henry V* (in the Folio only, the Quartos not even having the later choruses, of which the prologue is technically and actually the first); the prologue to *Troilus and Cressida* (in the Folio only); and the prologue to *Romeo and Juliet*. The preservation of the *Troilus* prologue is demonstrably a mere typographical accident, the need to fill up an unexpected blank page. The *Henry V* prologue-chorus is an integral part of the imaginative staging, a verbal scenario to atone for the physical limitations of the Elizabethan stage. But why is the *Romeo and Juliet* preserved, and why is it the only one preserved in the Quartos? It looks as if it has a peculiar and a dramatic rather than a merely theatrical association with the play. The Folio editors recognized that the *Henry V* prologue and choruses were part of *Henry V*; so, though the quartos had omitted them, they adopted them in their text. But though they had the text of the *Romeo and Juliet* prologue they omitted it. Yet the unique preservation of the prologue of *Romeo and Juliet* in the quartos seems to suggest that Shakespeare regarded it as more than a formal necessity, even though after its second and uselessly formal utterance in the course of the play, he let it disappear. May he not have tried to make it serve the purpose often fulfilled by a modern programme? May he not have meant it as a guide to the audience, a hint as to how they should take the things they were about to see? In any case, it is so short, and withal so artificially unconventional in metre, that it could not have been intended to give much help in the mere material business of expediting the shuffle of the audience to their places. Moreover, the metrical form of it was clearly suggested by Shakespeare's source. Broke's poem has a prose letter to the reader, then thirty lines of verse also to the reader, and then a sonnet called 'The Argument'. Shakespeare's prologue is a sonnet.

But in content it is entirely different from Broke's. Broke

gives a mere résumé of the main events in the story. Shakespeare does much more:

Two households, both alike in dignity,  
In fair Verona where we lay our scene,  
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,  
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.  
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes  
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life;  
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows  
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.  
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,  
And the continuance of their parents' rage,  
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,  
Is now the two-hours' traffic of our stage:  
The which, if you with patient ears attend,  
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

In this play-bill the dramatist is heavily leading the type of two features. First, Verona is torn by a terrible blood-thirsty feud which no human endeavour had been able to settle; this was the direct cause of the death of the lovers, and, but for those deaths, it never would have been healed. Second, the course of the young lovers' lives is from the outset governed by a malignant destiny; fatal, star-crossed, death-marked, they are doomed to piteous destruction.

The intent of this emphasis is clear. The tale will end with the death of two ravishingly attractive young folk; and the dramatist must exonerate himself from all complicity in their murder, lest he be found guilty of pandering to a liking for human shambles. He disowns responsibility and throws it on to Destiny, Fate. The device is well warranted in the tragic tradition, and especially in its Senecan models. But whether, in fact, it succeeds is a matter for further consideration. The invocation of Fate is strengthened by the second feature scored heavily in the prologue, the feud. The feud is, so to speak, the means by which Fate acts. The feud is to provide the sense of immediate, and Fate that of ultimate, inevitability. For it may happen that, however the dramatist deploys his

imaginative suggestions, he may fail to summon up a Fate sufficiently compelling to force itself upon the audience as unquestioned shaper of the tragic end. In such circumstances Romeo's and Juliet's death would be by mere chance, a gratuitous intervention by a dramatist exercising his homicidal proclivities for the joy of his audience. Hence the feud has a further function. It will be the dramatist's last plea for exculpation or for mercy; and it will allow his audience to absolve him or forgive him without loss of its own 'philanthropy'; for through death came the healing of the feud, and with it, the removal of the threat to so many other lives.

It becomes therefore of critical importance to watch Shakespeare's handling of these two motives, Fate and Feud, to see how he fits them to fulfil their function, and to ask how far in fact they are adequate to the role they must perforce play. As a starting-point, turn to earlier tellers of the tale of Romeo and Juliet, and see what use these predecessors of Shakespeare had made of the motives. This is no question of source-hunting. Shakespeare leaned on Broke, and on Broke alone. It is merely a matter of watching a legend grow towards tragic ripeness.

The story begins in Masuccio's *Novellino*, 1476.<sup>1</sup> It was then told by Luigi da Porto between 1520 and 1530.<sup>2</sup> Next comes Adrien Sevin, who told it from Masuccio, not Porto, as part of the dedicatory letter to his translation of Boccaccio's *Philocolo*, 1542.<sup>3</sup> Probably soon after his is the first version in verse, the pseudonymous Clizia's *Infelice Amore dei due fedelissimi Amanti, Giulia e Romeo*, printed in 1553 but probably written some years before.<sup>4</sup> Then comes

<sup>1</sup> Masuccio Salernitano, *Il Novellino*, Naples, 1476. I use the text in *Novelle del Quattrocento*, ed. G. Fatini, Torino, 1929.

<sup>2</sup> Luigi da Porto, *Hystoria novellamente ritrovata di due nobili Amanti* Venice, circa 1530. I use the text in *Rime e Prosa di Messer Luigi da Porto*, Vicenza, 1731.

<sup>3</sup> I use the text printed by Albert Cohn in *Jahrbuch der deutschen Shakespeare-Gesellschaft*, xxiv, 1889.

<sup>4</sup> Printed in a volume called *Giulietta e Romeo di Luigi da Porto* (to

by far the most attractive non-dramatic version, Bandello's, 1554.<sup>1</sup> Bandello was turned into French by Pierre Boaistuau in his *Histoires Tragiques extraictes des Œuvres italiennes de Bandel*, 1559.<sup>2</sup> But Boaistuau's version is much more a close retelling than a translation. It was the French form, however, which was translated into English by William Painter in his *Palace of Pleasure*, 1567<sup>3</sup> (and it was the French form which Broke knew). Then comes the first extant dramatic version Luigi Groto's *La Hadriana*, 1578. In these many versions, Feud and Fate fare differently.

To begin with the feud. There is no feud at all in Masuccio. His Romeo (called Mariotto) loves his Juliet (called Giannozza) ardently, and in process of time she returns his love. They reach the point at which, having fed their eyes on the sweet flowers of love, they each long to taste its sweetest fruits; Giannozza suggests to Mariotto that he should marry her secretly, so that continuing to take their pleasure, they may, if discovered, plead their secret wedding in exoneration.<sup>4</sup> Morals here are certainly not too tight.<sup>5</sup>

which are appended Bandello's and Clizia's versions), ed. A. Torri, Pisa, 1831. Fränkel (*Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literaturgeschichte*, N.F. iii, 1890) takes Clizia to be Gherardo Boldiero; he has less evidence for naming 1530 as the probable date of composition.

<sup>1</sup> I use the text in *Novelle di Matteo Bandello* (Raccolta di Novellieri italiani), Torino, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> I use the edition, Paris, 1561.

<sup>3</sup> I use the text in Hazlitt's *Shakespeare's Library*, 1875. Hazlitt has one note to the text, and it is wrong. He changes an original 'fortunate' (p. 253) to 'unfortunate'. But the French has *fortunez* and means it. Hazlitt has missed the literary figure and relied on what he thought was common sense.

<sup>4</sup> p. 207: 'ed avendo per più tempo pasciuti gli occhi de li soavi fiori de amore, desiderandosi per ciascuno gustare li suoi dolcissimi frutti, e cercate più e diverse vie, e niuna cauta trovandone, la giovene che non era meno prudente che bella, deliberò occultamente sel togliere per marito, a tale che se per contrarietà di fati il godere loro fosse interdetto, avessero avuto scuto da coprire il commesso errore.'

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 'avendo di tal furtivo e licito in parte amore alquanto con felicità goduto.'

Though Masuccio has no feud, his Mariotto is exiled for killing a citizen in the street,<sup>1</sup> but the man was no relative of Giannozza's.

Sevin's version, after, but independent of, Porto's, also has no feud. But in its course a very French form of family hostility, enmity on a point of honour, emerges from the action itself. Here Romeo and Juliet<sup>2</sup> are children of parents who are close friends, so close that Romeo and Juliet and Juliet's brother are all brought up together. Their fathers die of plague. Juliet's brother, seeing the clear and undisguised signs of Romeo and Juliet's mutual love, and feeling himself responsible for Juliet's reputation, forbids Romeo's visits to her.<sup>3</sup> Next day, overcome by despair and anger, Romeo returns to the house, fights Juliet's brother and kills him. Romeo becomes a fugitive, and, of course, Juliet must in honour hate her brother's murderer. But she is soon persuaded to forgive him, and, in order to join him in exile, she takes a drug provided by a priest. It makes her appear to be dead. Romeo hears of her death, returns to find her corpse, and poisons himself in the presence of it. Juliet awakes before Romeo dies. They profess their virgin love for each other; she drinks what is left of Romeo's poison, and they die together.

The first appearance of the feud proper is in Porto's account. Obviously he needed a better excuse than Masuccio's

<sup>1</sup> p. 207: 'Mariotto un dì venendo a parole con un altro onorevole cittadino e da parole a fatti in tanto andò la cosa che Mariotto ferì colui d'un bastone in testa, de la quale ferita fra brevi dì si morì.'

<sup>2</sup> I call them here Romeo and Juliet, for Sevin's names (he sets his tale in the Morea) are terrible to see and to speak. Juliet is Burgliphā, her brother Bruhachim, and Romeo is Halquadrich.

<sup>3</sup> pp. 126-7: 'Mais pour ne tumber en plus grief scandale, perdition de noz maisons et dangers de noz corps et ames, aussi que vous sçavez assez la coustume qui est de ne frequenter trop une pucelle de bonne et ancienne maison, et que l'honneur y gist: Dadvantaige que autres filles tenues au contraire en grande liberté et à la veue d'ung chascun sont quasi vilipendées, et ne les peuent leur freres ou parens marier sinon en bas lieux.'



for a secret wedding.<sup>1</sup> So Porto introduces a family feud between the Montecchi and the Cappelletti.<sup>2</sup> These most noble families, both equally endowed with the riches

<sup>1</sup> In the later legend it is not easy to absolve Romeo entirely from the laxness of morals with which Masuccio started him. In Porto, Romeo, having seen Juliet at the ball, begins to hang about her home at night. One night she sees him near her window, and he makes love to her, telling her that he cannot live without her. But when she asks him what he wants, his reply is somewhat ambiguous: *quello che amore vuole*, he says. They decided to renew their chaste and furtive conversation. But one night it snowed heavily, and when Romeo arrived at the window he begged Juliet to let him come into her room. But Juliet is at once on her honour; he shall take no liberties *più oltre come innamorato*. When he protests that he desires no more, she sends him off to Friar Lawrence to arrange their wedding. In Bandello, Romeo sees Juliet at the ball and then takes to walking near her home. On the first night that he sees her at the window he begs to come into her room so that 'at greater ease and with less danger he may show her the greatness of his love'. Of course Juliet is angry, telling him that he is as wrong as wrong can be if he hopes to have from her anything beyond what is decent and proper ('*ma ben vi dico che, se voi pensate di me godere oltre il convenevole nodo di matrimonio, voi vivete in grandissimo errore*'). At Juliet's suggestion, Romeo promises to see Friar Lawrence about a secret marriage. Whilst the arrangements are being made, he is permitted to come into Juliet's room secretly by means of a rope-ladder, and after he had told her of the arrangement with the friar, they talked of their love for a long time. Boiautau omitted this clandestine visit; Juliet talking to Romeo at a safe distance has warned him: '*si vous pretendez autre privauté de moy que l'honneur ne le commande, vous vivez en tres grand erreur.*' Romeo reassures her and suggests (in Bandello it is Juliet's suggestion) calling in the Friar's help: '*ce que elle accorda volontiers, et se finirent leurs propos sans que Rhomeo receust pour ce soir autre faveur d'elle que de parole.*' How nature can compromise with nicety when a Frenchman tells a tale!

<sup>2</sup> p. 65. He adds, however, that according to old documents he has seen, the now hostile families had formerly joined as allies in noble patriotic ventures. O. H. Moore (*Speculum*, v, 1930) pursues the legend of these families farther back. They are first named together in Dante's *Purgatorio*, but as political groups, not families, and not as enemies. One of Dante's commentators, Benvenuto da Imola (1379), makes them families, and another, Francesco da Buti (1380), keeps them as political groups but makes them hostile to each other.

of heaven and of fortune,<sup>1</sup> were at odds, whether for personal or political reasons no one knew.<sup>2</sup> But whatever the cause, for some time now they had been at bitter enmity: such a thing often happens between great houses.<sup>3</sup> Lately, however, the prince had imposed partial reconciliation; they were now even on speaking terms.<sup>4</sup> Romeo, to be near a cruel lady (Shakespeare's Rosaline) whom he desperately loves, goes to a fancy-dress ball at the Capulets', disguised as a woman, and wearing a mask (for custom, not for safety).<sup>5</sup> He is known by everybody there; Giulietta knows him at sight. There is some flutter of surprise amongst the ladies that he has ventured into the Capulet house, *massimamente la notte*, when, of course, old scores could most easily and most safely be paid off by hot-headed enemies. Romeo and Giulietta fall in love and lament the hostility of their families; Giulietta tells herself that even if Romeo should love her, her father will never consent to the marriage.<sup>6</sup> 'But who knows?' she says: 'our families are tired of their quarrels and our marriage would be a good and likely way of reconciliation'.<sup>7</sup> Romeo began at night-time to frequent the district in which Giulietta lived, hung about the house, and sometimes climbed to her balcony or even up to the window of her room 'con grandissimo pericolo della sua vita, se stato vi fosse trovato' (but there needs

<sup>1</sup> p. 65: 'famiglie di valorosi huomini e di ricchezze ugualmente dal cielo e della fortuna dotate.'

<sup>2</sup> p. 64: 'due nobilissime famiglie, per contraria fattione over per particular odio tra se nimiche.'

<sup>3</sup> p. 65: 'come il più delle volte tralle gran case si vede avenire, che che la cagione se ne fosse.'

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.: 'che gran parte de loro huomini insieme parlavano: essendo così costoro quasi rappacificati.'

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.: 'trattasi la Maschera, come ogni altro faceva, ed in habito di donna trovandosi.'

<sup>6</sup> p. 66: 'Posto che per isposa egli me volesse, il padre mio di darglimi non consentir giamai.'

<sup>7</sup> p. 67: 'chi sa? forse che per meglio rappacificarsi insieme queste due case, che già stanche e satie sono di farsi trallor più guerra, mi potrebbe anchora venir fatto d'haverlo in quella guisa ch'io lo desidero.'

little extra spur from a feud to make such exploits dangerous to the marauder!). Giulietta tells him how unsafe his actions are: she will prevent further risks by marrying him secretly. Romeo asks the friar to marry them, saying that afterwards they will contrive to get parental goodwill. The friar dare not refuse any request from Romeo, and he sees a chance of increasing his public reputation by reconciling the two houses. After their marriage the lovers spent many nights secretly together, and all having gone well for some time, they were hoping soon to dare to ask for Capulet's blessing.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the almost extinct enmity (*la già quasi morta nimista*) broke out afresh. There was a mêlée in the street; Romeo was involved, but forebore to strike any of Giulietta's house until, seeing his own friends wounded, *vinto dall' ira*, he rushed on Thebaldo Cappelletti and killed him. Romeo is banished. Giulietta begs to be taken with him into exile. He will not consent, saying that very soon the family quarrel will be healed, so she must be content with his absence for a few days.<sup>2</sup> But after Romeo's departure, Giulietta pines; her mother imagines that she is secretly grieving her unwedded state, and to console her, tells her she shall have a husband of her own choice, even if he be a Montague.<sup>3</sup> The father negotiates a marriage with the count, and the story runs to the end more or less as in the familiar version. Over the dead bodies of the children the parents swear peace.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> p. 69: 'più notti del loro amore felicemente goderon, aspettando col tempo di trovar modo per lo quale il padre della donna, che a' lor desiderii contrario essere sapevano, si potesse placare.'

<sup>2</sup> p. 70: 'Ma perciò che io son certo che le cose non possono lungamente in questo modo stare, anzi che la pace tra nostri habbia a seguire, onde anchora io la grazia del signore di leggieri impetrarei; intendo che voi senza me per alcun giorno vi restiate.'

<sup>3</sup> p. 72: 'vedi, figliuola, non piagnere horamai più, che marito a tua posta ti si darà, sì quasi uno de Montecchi volessi.'

<sup>4</sup> p. 82: 'sopra i lor morti figliuoli piagnendo da doppia pietà vinti, avengachè nimici fossero, s'abbracciarono in modo, che la lunga nimistà tra essi . . . per la misera e pietosa morte di questi amanti hebbe fine.'

Such is the feud in Porto. It serves the novelist's purpose excellently. It provides a setting of factual circumstance by which the novelist's *vraisemblable* is generally secured. It is presented as in a chronicle; and though, in its effects on the plot, it is a major accident, in itself it has been subdued to the requisite likelihood by which fiction persuades. But a feud in tragic drama has much heavier functions.

Bandello's feud starts much like Porto's. There were two families distinguished by nobility and riches, between whom, for some reason or another, there had arisen fierce and bloody hostility.<sup>1</sup> The prince had tried to reconcile them, but unsuccessfully, so deeply did hatred stick in their hearts. Still, he had managed to secure a sort of truce, and almost established public order, so far at least that the youths on each side paid proper courtesy to the elders of the other.<sup>2</sup> Romeo, persuaded to live gaily so as to forget his cruel first love, goes openly to Capulet's ball in search of gaiety; and although the families were by no means friends, no one took offence at his going.<sup>3</sup> During the evening Romeo took off his mask (which was not a disguise) and sat in a corner. The ladies paid him special attention, and were surprised that he was staying so openly in Capulet's house.<sup>4</sup> But everybody liked Romeo for his grace and his accomplishments; and even his enemies tolerated his intrusion on account of his youth.<sup>5</sup> He fell in love with Giulietta, but neither knew who the other was. When each discovered the other's identity, they lamented the family

<sup>1</sup> p. 243: 'due famiglie in Verona trà l'altre di nobiltà e ricchezze molto famose . . . le quali tra loro, che se ne fosse cagione, ebbero fiera e sanguinolente nimicizia.'

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.: 'di maniera che, se si scontravano, i giovani davano luogo ai più vecchi della contraria fazione.'

<sup>3</sup> p. 245: 'e benchè fossero poco amici, pur non s'offendevano.'

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.: 'e tutti si meravigliavano ch'egli sì liberamente in quella casa dimorasse.'

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.: 'i suoi nemici poi non gli ponevano così la mente, come forse avrebbero fatto s'egli fosse stato di maggior etate.'

hostility. Giulietta (as in Porto) even feared that Romeo was making love to her to secure victory in the feud by bringing her to shame, for there had been some signs that the old enmity was reviving.<sup>1</sup> But she easily persuades herself that so beautiful a man must be honest; and so she can surely expect that, if they marry, her father will be won to consent, for that is a well-authenticated way to end family feuds.<sup>2</sup> When she finds Romeo lurking at night near her window, she reminds him that he may be killed and she may lose her reputation.<sup>3</sup> Friar Lawrence consents to marry them secretly, giving the same reasons as in Porto. After the marriage both hoped to win Capulet's blessing. Friar Lawrence had almost brought about the happy reconciliation.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, there is an unexpected street-brawl. Romeo tries to quell it and endeavours to make peace on the spot with Tebaldo. But Tebaldo fiercely attacks Romeo, who, retaliating, kills him. From this point onwards the story continues without particular reference to the feud. It ends with the summary statement that the prince ordered the burial of the lovers in the same

<sup>1</sup> p. 248: 'Forse lo scaltrito giovine quelle parole per ingannarmi m'ha dette, acciò che ottenendo cosa da me meno che onesta, di me si gabbi e donna di volgo mi faccia, parendoli forse a questo modo far la vendetta della nimistà, che tutto il dì incrudelisce più tra i suoi e i miei parenti.'

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.: 'non debb' io ragionevolmente pensare che mio padre nol consentirà già mai? Ma chi sa che per mezzo di questo parentado non si possa sperare che segua tra queste due famiglie una perpetua concordia e ferma pace? io ho pure più volte udito dire che per gli spozalizi fatti, non solamente tra privati cittadini e gentiluomini si sono delle paci fatte, ma molte volte tra grandissimi principi e regi, tra i quali le crudelissime guerre regnavano una vera pace ad amicizia con soddisfacimento di tutti è seguita.'

<sup>3</sup> p. 249: 'certamente voi sareste crudelmente ucciso; del che a voi danno e a me poco onore ne seguirebbe.'

<sup>4</sup> p. 253: 'Frà Lorenzo tuttavia praticava, quanto poteva, la pace tra' Montecchi ed i Capelletti, ed aveva ridotto le cose ad assai buon termine; di tal maniera che sperava conchiuder il parentado degli amanti con buona soddisfazione di tutte due le parti.'

tomb: 'il che fu cagione che tra i Montecchi e Capelletti si fece la pace, benchè non molto da poi durasse.'<sup>1</sup>

Bandello's feud is much like Porto's, a last remnant of a former hostility now almost dead, but liable to sporadic renewal when hot-blooded youngsters on either side are heated to high spirits by a festive occasion. It is an excellent implement in a novelist's plot, providing the surprise of accident without destroying a general *vraisemblance*.

Boaistuau does not, of course, go far from Bandello's text. But some of his formal or verbal changes touch this affair of the feud. At the very outset, where Bandello simply says that there was hostility 'whatever the cause of it may have been', Boaistuau tries to give it more substance. It is the sort of thing which often happens between houses 'of equal degree in honour';<sup>2</sup> in such circumstances, light and even misapprehended occasions lead to devastating enmity.<sup>3</sup> Like Bandello, he records that the prince had enforced some pacification; but whilst in Bandello it had produced almost a resumption of social respect, in Boaistuau it is a mere armistice.<sup>4</sup> Bandello's Romeo goes light-heartedly to the Capulet ball; Boaistuau recalls the enmity and says that because of it Romeo was the only Montague present.<sup>5</sup> At the ball Bandello's Romeo goes to a corner, his mask removed, in order to have better view of the fair ladies present; Boaistuau's Romeo goes because he feels uneasy

<sup>1</sup> p. 275.

<sup>2</sup> 32<sup>v</sup>. This is a phrase (the only one I have noted) taken from Porto.

<sup>3</sup> 32<sup>v</sup>: 'mais ainsi que le plus souvent il y a envie entre ceux qui sont en pareil degré d'honneur, aussi survint-il quelque inimitié entr'eux: et combien que l'origine en fust léger et assez mal fondé, si est-ce que par intervalle de temps il s'enflamma si bien qu'en diverses menées qui se dresserent d'une part et d'autre plusieurs y laisserent la vie.'

<sup>4</sup> 32<sup>v</sup>: 'de sorte qu'il ne peust gagner sur eux autre chose, que leur faire laisser les armes pour un temps, attendant quelque autre saison plus opportune, ou avec plus de loisir, il eseroit appaiser le reste.'

<sup>5</sup> 34: 'la famille de Capellets estoit en disside avec celle des Monteschés qui fut la cause pour laquelle les Montesches ne se trouverent à ce convy, hors mis ce jeune adolescent Rhomeo.'

about his presence. Bandello's Romeo excites wonder from the ladies for his freedom in coming to the ball; Boaistuau's phrase makes the escapade seem much more hazardous.<sup>1</sup> Bandello simply says that on account of Romeo's youth the Capulets did not worry themselves about his presence; Boaistuau says that they smothered their hatred, doing or saying nothing against him, whether out of regard for the company assembled or for his age.<sup>2</sup> Bandello records that Juliet asked her nurse who the young man was; the nurse told her it was Romeo. Boaistuau puts the question into direct speech, and makes the nurse reply: 'c'est Rhomeo Montesche, fils du capital ennemy de vostre pere et de ses alliez'.<sup>3</sup> When the fatal brawl occurs in the street, Bandello makes Romeo come upon it by chance whilst on a stroll.<sup>4</sup> In Boaistuau Romeo is fetched by his allies, and arrives to find the ground completely covered with arms, legs, thighs, and blood.<sup>5</sup> Bandello's Romeo was wearing, as he always did, a coat of mail;<sup>6</sup> in Boaistuau, it was a coat he wore specially as a precaution against Capulet attacks.<sup>7</sup> Bandello baldly records that this new onset of hostility came from a clash of rival groups in the street; Boaistuau recalls that, in spite of partial reconciliation, sparks of the old enmity awaited only the slightest puff to fan them into burning flame; and such an occasion was caused by Easter revelries, *comme les hommes sanguinaires sont volontiers costumiers aupres les bonnes festes, commetre les mechantes œuvres*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 34<sup>v</sup>: 'encores s'esmerveilloient elles d'avantage de son assurance et comme il avoit osé entrer avec telle privauté en la maison de ceux qui avoient peu d'occasion de luy vouloir bien.'

<sup>2</sup> 34<sup>v</sup>: 'Toutefois les Capellets dissimulans leur hayne ou bien pour la reverence de la compagnie ou pour le respect de son aage, ne luy meffirent, ny d'effect ny de paroles.'  
<sup>3</sup> 37.

<sup>4</sup> Bandello, 254: 'andavano per la città a diporto.'

<sup>5</sup> 42<sup>v</sup>: 'car la terre estoit toute couverte de bras, de jambes, de cuisses, et de sang.'

<sup>6</sup> 254: 'che aveva le maniche della maglia che sempre portava.'

<sup>7</sup> 43: 'le iaques qu'il portoit ordinairement pour le doute qu'il avoit des Capellets.'  
<sup>8</sup> 42<sup>v</sup>.

The accumulative effect of these minor turns of phrase and detail is to make the feud seem more ominous and deadly. It was from Boiastuau's version of the tale that Shakespeare's English predecessors had their *Romeo and Juliet*. Painter's prose version, which was not Shakespeare's source, sticks very closely to his original. Even here, however, through stylistic trick or through ignorance of French, a detail or two of difference intensifies the feud. Boiastuau says that the origin of the feud was *leger et assez mal fondé*;<sup>1</sup> Painter says 'the beginning thereof was unlawful and of ill-foundation'.<sup>2</sup> Boiastuau says that when Romeo *tout honteux* retired to a corner at the ball, *il fut incontinent avisé de tous*.<sup>3</sup> Painter makes Romeo, 'very shamefast', a more palpable hider from danger; 'he was *by and by* known and looked up by the whole company'.<sup>4</sup> The nurse in Boiastuau tells Giulietta that Romeo is son of her father's capital enemy; Painter adopts this and adds 'and deadly foe to all your line'.<sup>5</sup> Boiastuau's explanation of the fresh outbreak as a deed which violent men do sounds more ominous in Painter's English—'as bloudy men commonly be most willingly disposed after a good time to commit some nefarious deed'.<sup>6</sup>

But Painter's version was not the English account of the story which caught Shakespeare's imagination. It was Broke's. And Broke's was in verse. Naturally the *leit-motive* of a poet are different from those of a novelist. Feuds and fate appear as providential inducements when versifiers tell the tale. But the first poet who adopted it did not make much of the feud. In *Clizia* it is of little moment. There had been *inimicizia fiera*, but the fury of it was gone; and civic peace had been restored:

Vivendo in pace fean che l'allegrezze  
Erano ognor nella cittade estreme.<sup>7</sup>

Antonio Capelletti was loved both by his own faction, the

<sup>1</sup> 32<sup>v</sup>.<sup>2</sup> 207.<sup>3</sup> 34<sup>v</sup>.<sup>4</sup> 210.<sup>5</sup> 214.<sup>6</sup> 223.<sup>7</sup> 150.



'whites', and by his opponents, the 'browns'.<sup>1</sup> But Clizia's neglect of the feud as a rich source of poetic possibilities is explicable. Fate is the main point of Clizia's poetic apostrophe.

That, too, is Broke's way. He omits nothing of Boais-tuau's telling of the enmity. But he foregoes the poetic opportunity to enlarge on it, except once, when in the spirit of Boais-tuau's version of the street brawl, he allows himself poetic license to give details of the fighting:

Here one doth gaspe for breth, his frend bestrideth him;  
And he hath lost a hand, and he another maymed lim;  
His leg is cutte whilst he strikes at an other full,  
And whom he would have thrust quite through, hath cleft his  
cracked skull.

Theyr valiant harts forbode theyr foote to geve the groundes;  
With unappauled cheere they tooke full deepe and doutfull  
wounde.

Thus foote by foote long while, and shield to shield set fast,  
One foe doth make another faynt, but makes him not agast.<sup>2</sup>

Such then is the kind of feud of which Shakespeare read. It was somewhat more apt to his purpose than it had been in its beginnings. Even so it had not climbed to the full height of a tragic motive. So uninspired a dramatist as Groto realized this; in his *Hadriana*, the enmity of the rival families is lifted above social pique into the momentousness of wider consequence. The Romeo and Juliet of *Hadriana* are children of rival kings, putting each his country's forces against the other's in a dispute of international significance. Though Groto's complete lack of genius prevented his proper dramatic use of such a feud, it is a feud of such sort which might be an adequate means of tragedy. The Italian novelists had themselves told of family enmities apt to the circumstance of a tragic love story. There is, for instance, a sixteenth-century tale by Scipion Bargagli which tells how, after heavy and long enmity between two noble families, the son of the conquered and exiled family

<sup>1</sup> 150: 'Nè dalla bianca sua fazione amato Sol era, ma l'amava ancor la bruna.'

<sup>2</sup> 117.

sees the daughter of the triumphant one at a country festival; we hear of their love, and of his cruel lot in seeking to meet with her. But the hazards faced, a trick ultimately turns their story to happiness.<sup>1</sup>

But Shakespeare had to take the feud as Broke had gathered it. Before seeing what Shakespeare makes of it, and how he tries to adapt it for tragedy, it will be well to see how much the motive of Fate plays in the story before it reaches Shakespeare. The crucial points in the plot are three: the impediments to a normal open marriage; the slaying which leads to exile; and Romeo's ignorance of Juliet's drug-plan. The story-teller must give these an air of novelistic credibility, either by presenting them as the surprising chances which life not infrequently provides, or by contriving them as the natural consequences of circumstance. Masuccio has little trouble with his facts: his secret wedding is a deliberate choice of the lovers themselves; the slaying is the outcome of a chance quarrel; the drug-taking is the lady's device to avoid subsequent marriage with a suitor favoured by her father, and her secret husband's place of exile is so far away across the sea that it is not surprising that he hears of his wife's death before he hears from her that she is plotting to sham death. Only twice does Masuccio think it appropriate to attribute the turns in his story to the malignity of fortune rather than to mere chance. It was *la loro prava* (i.e. *maligna*) *ed inimica fortuna*,<sup>2</sup> determined to turn their joys to sorrow, which brought about the fatal brawl in the streets; and it was *l'avversa e noiosa fortuna*<sup>3</sup> which allowed the wrong letter to reach the exile first. Luigi da Porto's story has even less need of malign fate, and the points at which bad luck turns the action are put as the mere chance which frustrates the best-laid schemes of men. His feud is sufficient motive for the secret wedding. The recurrence of hostilities is the only episode Porto sets down to *fortuna ad ogni mondano diletto*

<sup>1</sup> See *Novelle di Autori Senesi*, vol. 2, Londra, 1798, pp. 148-70.

<sup>2</sup> 207.

<sup>3</sup> 211.

*nimica*.<sup>1</sup> The miscarrying of the letter for Romeo he sharpens to the finest edge of mere ill-luck: he contrives what normally would be ample safeguards for the success of the drug-plot. Juliet is driven to consult the friar without her husband's knowledge because her parents have decided to expedite the marriage they have planned for her. She tells the friar she will kill herself if he does not help her. Constrained by the threat, the friar consents, but especially warns her not to forget the letter which will tell Romeo of the device. He himself takes special precautions to ensure delivery, sending the letter by a brother friar. But the messenger did not know the seriousness of its contents: he went two or three times to Romeo's house in Mantua, 'ne per sua gran sciagura trovato mai in casa, e non volendo la lettera ad altri che allui proprio dare'; and so Romeo never got it. Worse still, when Romeo's man Pietro heard of Juliet's death, before rushing off to tell Romeo, he sought out the friar, but failed to find him, 'il quale per alcuna bisogna del Monistero poco fuori della Città era andato': and so he took the false news to Romeo. In ways like that the novel has always sought to give the appearance of actuality to its incidents.

Sevin's version, without initial feud, and making the prohibition of the lovers' union entirely a deliberate act of the lady's brother, needs little help from the waywardness of circumstance. The only mischance is that the lover hears of his lady's death without knowing that the seeming death is a plan. But Sevin's tale illustrates the manner in which the motive of fate will graft itself onto the story. The persons of the piece will be given the traditional outcries against the powers which doom them to misery. Happiness is denied by *le muable hazard de Fortune*;<sup>2</sup> and the hero will lament his cruel lot, cursing sun, moon, and the stars for ordaining his misfortune.<sup>3</sup> When poets take up the tale, these are the

<sup>1</sup> 69.

<sup>2</sup> 129.

<sup>3</sup> 130: 'Si plura amerement se complaignant en grande compassion de sa tant malheureuse et aspre fortune qui l'avoit conduit à si dur

points they will decorate. Clizia freely seizes on them for sententious commonplaces about destiny. A malicious fate seizes Romeo the moment he enters the Capulet house:

Indrizzò i passi ove la sorte ria  
Del suo sì picciol bene, e del futuro  
Suo sì gran male avea fissa la via.  
Oh del mondo sperar fallace, oscuro!<sup>1</sup>

In the joy of love, Romeo knows not *l'iniqua sua sorte futura*, and how joy will soon be grief:

Ecco cangiarsi in ciel le instabil sorti;  
Fortuna rea di ben oprar sì pente.<sup>2</sup>

They are married *con infelice augurio*, a *coppia sventurata*:

Ah! qual ria sorte  
Fa che tanti il cuor nostro affanni prove!<sup>3</sup>

Bandello is entirely different. He tells his tale plainly, neither calling in nor apostrophizing Fate. His actions and situations follow as likely happenings in the given circumstances. The feud explains the secret marriage: the renewal of enmity is recorded just as a chance which happened; and, even more carefully than Porto, he plots the drug-episode with full plausibility. A letter telling Romeo the true facts is sent by the hand of a friar to Mantua; the friar called in the convent at Mantua to pick up a fellow friar, but found himself forbidden exit since an inmate had died under suspicion of plague. The friar pleaded to be allowed to depart; but all pleas were in vain. Moreover, Romeo's servant, Pietro, hearing of Giulietta's death, was so dazed that, departing to tell Romeo, he forgot his usual practice of calling on Friar Lawrence *en route*. Still further, Bandello says that Friar Lawrence, 'for some reason or another', *che che fosse la cagione*, had arranged that Giulietta should not be brought from her tomb until the second night after burial: had he planned it for the first passage. Et en mauldissant et despitant le Ciel, Soleil, Lune, Estoilles et Elemens, confessant des sa naissance avoir toujours esté nourry en pleurs et gémissemens.'

<sup>1</sup> 151.<sup>2</sup> 167.<sup>3</sup> 169.

night, Romeo would not have found her supposed corpse in the tomb.

But when Boaistuau retold Bandello, he turned Bandello's naturalistic method into a more conventionally literary one. A trick of his style is to insert fatalistic moralizings and ominous premonitions. Sometimes it is a mere word. Bandello's Giulietta calls herself *sciocca*, foolish, for imagining that Romeo loves her: Boaistuau renders *sciocca*, '*infortunée*'. When Boaistuau's lovers are rapturously married, they defy the stars—'let death and fortune do what they will!'<sup>1</sup> When the feud breaks out again, Boaistuau puts it down to malign fortune; their marriage has been joy until fortune, envying their happiness, has turned her wheel and plunged them into such an abyss that as usury for their pleasure they must pay with a cruel and pitiful death.<sup>2</sup> There is nothing of this in Bandello, nor of a long speech by Romeo taking leave of Juliet prior to going into exile: 'M'amie, ie n'ay pas maintenant delibéré de vous deduire la diversité des accidens estranges de l'inconstante et fragile fortune, laquelle esleve l'homme en un moment au plus hault degré de sa roue, et toutesfois en moins d'un cil d'œil elle le rabaisse et deprime si bien, qu'elle luy appreste plus de miseres en un jour que faveur en cent ans.'<sup>3</sup>

Naturally Painter incorporated these additions in his English version; and, of course, Broke, taking Bandello via Boaistuau, misses no opportunity for such sententiousness. Longer or shorter, there are at least fifteen passages in his poem where the malignity of Fate is his conventionally poetic theme. 'Froward fortune', 'fortune's cruel will', 'wavering fortune', 'tickel fortune', 'when fortune list to strike', 'false fortune cast for her, poore wretch, a myschiefe newe to brewe', 'dame fortune did assent', 'with piteous

<sup>1</sup> 41<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> 42<sup>v</sup>: 'jusques à tant que la fortune (envieuse de leur prospérité) tourna sa rouë pour les faire trebucher en un tel abisme qu'ils luy payerent l'usure de leurs plaisirs passez par une trescruelle et trespitoyable mort.'

<sup>3</sup> 46<sup>v</sup>.

plaint, fierce fortune doth he blame’, ‘till Attropos shall cut my fatall thread of lyfe’, ‘though cruel fortune be so much my dedly foe’, ‘the blyndfyld goddessse that with frowning face doth fraye, and from theyr seate the mighty kinges throwes downe with hedlong sway’, ‘he cried out, with open mouth, against the starres above, the fatall sisters three, he said, had done him wrong’—so often does Broke bring in

The diversenes and eke the accidents so straunge  
Of frayle unconstant Fortune that delyteth still in chaunge.<sup>1</sup>

Romeo cries out aloud

Against the restles starres in rolling skyes that raunge  
Against the fatall sisters three, and Fortune full of chaunge.<sup>2</sup>

There are more elaborate set speeches on the same theme:

For Fortune chaungeth more then fickel fantasie;  
In nothing Fortune constant is, save in unconstancie.  
Her hasty ronning wheele, is of a restles coorse,  
That turnes the clymers hedlong downe, from better to the  
woorse,

And those that are beneth, she heaveth up agayne.<sup>3</sup>

So when Shakespeare took up the story, Broke had already sought to drench it in fatality. But since Shakespeare was a dramatist, he could not handle Fate and Feud as a narrative poet could. His feud will enter, not descriptively, but as action; and for fate he must depend on the sentiments of his characters and on an atmosphere generated by the sweep of the action. The feud may be deferred for a moment to watch Shakespeare’s handling of fate.

His most frequent device is to adapt what Broke’s practice had been; instead of letting his persons declaim formally, as Broke’s do, against the inconstancy of Fortune, he endows them with dramatic premonitions. Setting out for Capulet’s ball, Romeo is suddenly sad:

my mind misgives  
Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars,  
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date  
With this night’s revels; and expire the term

<sup>1</sup> 142.

<sup>2</sup> 151.

<sup>3</sup> 147. See also 97, 115.

Of a despised life, clos'd in my breast,  
 By some vile forfeit of untimely death:  
 But He that hath the steerage of my course  
 Direct my sail!<sup>1</sup>

As the lovers first declare their passion, Juliet begs Romeo not to swear, as if an oath would be an evil omen:

I have no joy of this contract to-night:  
 It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;  
 Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be  
 Ere one can say 'It lightens'.<sup>2</sup>

Romeo, involved in the fatal fight, cries 'O, I am fortune's fool!'<sup>3</sup> Looking down from her window at Romeo as he goes into exile, Juliet exclaims

O God, I have an ill-divining soul!  
 Methinks I see thee, now thou art below,  
 As one dead in the bottom of a tomb.<sup>4</sup>

With dramatic irony Juliet implores her parents to defer her marriage with Paris—

Or, if you do not, make the bridal bed  
 In that dim monument where Tybalt lies.<sup>5</sup>

Besides these promptings of impending doom there are premonitions of a less direct kind. The friar fears the violence of the lovers' passion:

These violent delights have violent ends  
 And in their triumph die, like fire and powder,  
 Which as they kiss consume.<sup>6</sup>

Another source of omen in the play is the presaging of dreams; for from the beginning of time, the world of sleep, the realm of wild reality, has brought dreams which look like heralds of eternity and speak like Sybils of the future. There is much dreaming in *Romeo and Juliet*. Mercutio may mock at dreams as children of an idle brain, begot of nothing but vain phantasy. But when Romeo says he dream'd a dream to-night, Mercutio's famous flight of

<sup>1</sup> I. iv. 106.

<sup>2</sup> II. ii. 117.

<sup>3</sup> III. i. 141.

<sup>4</sup> III. v. 54.

<sup>5</sup> III. v. 202.

<sup>6</sup> II. vi. 9.

fancy recalls the universal belief in dreams as foreshadowings of the future. Again Romeo dreams. This time: ‘I dreamt my lady came and found me dead’.<sup>1</sup> As his man Balthasar waits outside Juliet’s tomb, he dreams his master and another fought: and the audience knows how accurately the dream mirrored the true facts.

But Shakespeare not only hangs omens thickly round his play. He gives to the action itself a quality apt to conjure the sense of relentless doom. It springs mainly from his compression of the time over which the story stretches. In all earlier versions there is a much longer lapse. Romeo’s wooing is prolonged over weeks before the secret wedding; then, after the wedding, there is an interval of three or four months before the slaying of Tybalt; and Romeo’s exile lasts from Easter until a short time before mid-September when the marriage with Paris was at first planned to take place. But in Shakespeare all this is pressed into three or four days. The world seems for a moment to be caught up in the fierce play of furies revelling in some mad supernatural game.

But before asking whether the sense of an all-controlling Fate is made strong enough to fulfil its tragic purpose let us turn to the feud. Here Shakespeare’s difficulties are even greater. Italian novelists of the quattro- or cinquecento, throwing their story back two or three generations, might expect their readers easily to accept a fierce vendetta. But the Verona which Shakespeare depicts is a highly civilized world, with an intellectual and artistic culture and an implied social attainment altogether alien from the sort of society in which a feud is a more or less natural manifestation of enmity. The border country of civilization is the home of feuds, a region where social organization is still that of the clan, where the head of the family-clan is a strong despot, and where law has not progressed beyond the sort of wild justice of which one instrument is the feud.

<sup>1</sup> v. i. 6.



And he has burn'd the dales of Tyne,  
 And part of Bambrough shire;  
 And three good towers on Roxburgh fells,  
 He left them all on fire.

And he march'd up to Newcastle,  
 And rode it round about;  
 'O who's the lord of this castle,  
 Or who's the lady o't?'

But up spake proud Lord Percy, then,  
 And O but he spake hie!  
 'I am the Lord of this castle,  
 My wife's the lady gay'.

'If thou'rt the lord of this castle,  
 Sae weel it pleases me!  
 For, ere I cross the border fells  
 The tane of us shall die'.

He took a long spear in his hand,  
 Shod with the metal free,  
 And for to meet the Douglas there  
 He rode right furiouslie.

It was wellnigh impossible for Shakespeare to fit the bloodlust of a border feud into the social setting of his Verona. The heads of the rival houses are not at all the fierce chieftains who rule with ruthless despotism. When old Capulet, in fire-side gown, bustles to the scene of the fray, and calls for his sword, his wife tells him bluntly that it is a crutch an old man such as he wants, not a weapon. Montague, too, spits a little verbal fire, but his wife plucks him by the arm, and tells him to calm down: 'thou shalt not stir one foot to seek a foe'. Indeed, these old men are almost comic figures, and especially Capulet. His querulous fussiness, his casual bonhomie, his almost senile humour and his childish irascibility hardly make him the pattern of a clan-chief. Even his domestics put him in his place:

Go, you cot-quean, go  
 Get you to bed; faith, you'll be sick to-morrow  
 For this night's watching.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> iv. iv. 7.

the nurse tells him; and the picture is filled in by his wife's reminder that she has put a stop to his 'mouse-hunting'. There is of course the prince's word that

Three civil brawls, bred of an airy word,  
By thee, old Capulet, and Montague,  
Have thrice disturb'd the quiet of our streets.<sup>1</sup>

But these brawls bred of an airy word are no manifestations of a really ungovernable feud. When Montague and Capulet are bound by the prince to keep the peace, old Capulet himself says

'tis not hard, I think,  
For men so old as we to keep the peace!<sup>2</sup>

and there is a general feeling that the old quarrel has run its course. Paris, suitor to Juliet, says it is a pity that the Capulets and the Montagues have lived at odds so long. And Benvolio, a relative of the Montagues, is a consistent peace-maker. He tries to suppress a brawl amongst the rival retainers, and invites Tybalt, a Capulet, to assist him in the work. Later he begs his friends to avoid trouble by keeping out of the way of the Capulets, for it is the season of hot blood:

I pray thee, good Mercutio, let's retire:  
The day is hot, the Capulet's abroad,  
And, if we meet, we shall not scape a brawl;  
For now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring.<sup>3</sup>

When the hot-blooded Mercutio does incite Tybalt to a quarrel, it is again Benvolio who tries to preserve the peace:

We talk here in the public haunt of men:  
Either withdraw unto some private place,  
And reason coldly of your grievances,  
Or else depart.<sup>4</sup>

Hence the jest of Mercutio's famous description of Benvolio as an inveterate quarreler, thirsting for the slightest excuse to draw sword.

Moreover, the rival houses have mutual friends. Mercutio,

<sup>1</sup> I. i. 96.

<sup>2</sup> I. ii. 2.

<sup>3</sup> III. i. 1.

<sup>4</sup> III. i. 53.

Montague Romeo's close acquaintance, is an invited guest at the Capulet's ball. Stranger still, so is Romeo's cruel lady, Rosaline, who in the invitation is addressed as Capulet's cousin. It is odd that Romeo's love for her, since she was a Capulet, had given him no qualms on the score of the feud. When Romeo is persuaded to go gate-crashing to the ball because Rosaline will be there, there is no talk at all of its being a hazardous undertaking. Safety will require, if even so much, no more than a mask.<sup>1</sup> On the way to the ball, as talk is running gaily, there is still no mention of danger involved. Indeed, the feud is almost a dead letter so far. The son of the Montague does not know what the Capulet daughter looks like, nor she what he is like. The traditional hatred survives only in one or two high-spirited, hot-blooded scions on either side, and in the kitchen-folk. Tybalt alone resents Romeo's presence at the ball, yet it is easy for all to recognize him; and because Tybalt feels Romeo's coming to be an insult, he seeks him out next day to challenge him, so providing the immediate occasion of the new outburst. Naturally, once blood is roused again, and murder done, the ancient rancour springs up with new life. Even Lady Capulet has comically Machiavellian plans for having Romeo poisoned in Mantua. But prior to this the evidences of the feud are so unsubstantial that the forebodings of Romeo and Juliet,

<sup>1</sup> In the earlier versions the mask is not a precaution for safety. Shakespeare, taking it partly as such, has to realize how utterly ineffective it is. Romeo is soon known:

That, by his voice, should be a Montague!  
Fetch me my rapier, boy. What dares the slave  
Come hither, cover'd with an antic face,  
To flee and scorn at our solemnity. (I. v. 56).

Clizia is the only teller of the tale who makes Romeo's disguise a device for protection:

Nè generando in lui nessun timore  
Lo sparso sangue e gli omicidii vecchi,  
Travestito, sicur si persuase  
Poter entrar nelle nimiche case. (151).

discovering each other's name, seem prompted more by fate than feud. There will, of course, be family difficulties; but the friar marries them without a hesitating qualm, feeling that such a union is bound to be accepted by the parents, who will thus be brought to amity.

The most remarkable episode, however, is still to be named. When Tybalt discovers Romeo at the ball, infuriated he rushes to Capulet with the news. But Capulet, in his festive mood, is pleasantly interested, saying that Romeo is reputed to be good-looking and quite a nice boy. He tells Tybalt to calm himself, remember his manners, and treat Romeo properly.

Content thee, gentle coz, let him alone;  
He bears him like a portly gentleman;  
And, to say truth, Verona brags of him  
To be a virtuous and well govern'd youth:  
I would not for the wealth of all the town  
Here in my house do him disparagement:  
Therefore be patient, take no note of him:  
It is my will, the which if thou respect,  
Show a fair presence and put off these frowns,  
An ill-beseeming semblance for a feast.<sup>1</sup>

When Tybalt is reluctant, old Capulet is annoyed and testily tells him to stop being a saucy youngster:

He shall be endured:  
What, goodman boy! I say, he shall: go to;  
Am I the master here or you? Go to.  
You'll not endure him! God shall mend my soul!  
You'll make a mutiny among my guests!  
You will set cock-a-hoop! you'll be the man!  
. . . . Go to, go to;  
You are a saucy boy: is't so indeed?  
This trick may chance to scathe you, I know what:  
You must contrary me! marry, 'tis time,  
Well said, my hearts! You are a princox; go.<sup>2</sup>

This is a scene which sticks in the memory; for here the dramatist, unencumbered by a story, is interpolating a lively scene in his own kind, a vignette of two very amusing

<sup>1</sup> I. v. 67.

<sup>2</sup> I. v. 78.

people in an amusing situation. But it is unfortunate for the feud that this episode takes so well. For clearly, old Capulet is unwilling to let the feud interrupt a dance; and a quarrel which is of less moment than a galliard is being appeased at an extravagant price, if the price is the death of two such delightful creatures as Romeo and Juliet—

—their parents' rage,

Which but their children's end naught could remove,

loses all its plausibility. A feud like this will not serve as the bribe it was meant to be; it is no atonement for the death of the lovers. Nor, indeed, is it coherent and impressive enough as part of the plot to provide the sweep of necessity to the sequence of events. If the tragedy is to march relentlessly to its end, leaving no flaw in the sense of inevitability which it seeks to prompt, it clearly must depend for that indispensable tragic impression mainly on its scattered suggestions of doom and malignant fate. And, as has been seen, Shakespeare harps frequently on this string.

But how far can a Roman sense of Fate be made real for a modern audience? It is no mere matter of exciting thought to wander through eternity in the wake of the mystery which surrounds the human lot. Mystery must take on positive shape, and half-lose itself in dread figures controlling human life in their malice. The forms and the phrases by which the powers had been invoked were a traditional part in the inheritance of Senecan drama which came to sixteenth-century Europe. *Fortuna*, *Fatum*, *Fata*, *Parcae*: these were firmly established in its *dramatis personae*. Moreover their role in Virgilian theocracy was familiar to all with but a little Latin:

Qua visa est Fortuna pati Parcaeque sinebant  
Cedere res Latio, Turnum et tua moenia texi;  
Nunc iuvenem imparibus video concurrere fati,  
Parcarumque dies et vis inimica propinquat.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Aeneid*, xii. 147.

For Romans here indeed were the shapers of destiny, the ultimate ἀνάγκη which compels human fate, whether as the μοῖρα of individual lot, or the εἰμαρμένη of a world-order. Horace himself linked Fortuna in closest companionship with Necessitas: *te semper anteit serva Necessitas*, he writes in his prayer to Fortuna.<sup>1</sup> It was a note which reverberated through Senecan stoicism.

But with what conviction could a sixteenth-century spectator take over these ancient figures? Even the human beings of an old mythology may lose their compelling power: what's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba? But the gods are in much worse case; pagan, they had faded before the God of the Christians: *Vicisti, Galilæe!* Fate was no longer a deity strong enough to carry the responsibility of a tragic universe; at most, it could intervene casually as pure luck, and bad luck as a motive turns tragedy to mere chance. It lacks entirely the ultimate tragic ἀνάγκη. It fails to provide the indispensable inevitability.

Is then Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* an unsuccessful experiment? To say so, may seem not only profane but foolish. In its own day, as the dog's-eared Bodley Folio shows, and since, it has been one of Shakespeare's most preferred plays. It is indeed rich in spells of its own. But as a pattern of the idea of tragedy, it is a failure. Even Shakespeare appears to have felt that, as an experiment, it had disappointed him. At all events, he abandoned himself for the next few years to history and comedy; and even afterwards, he fought shy of the simple theme of love, and of the love of anybody less than a great political figure, as main matter for his tragedies.

Nevertheless it is obvious that neither sadism nor masochism is remotely conscious in our appreciation of *Romeo and Juliet*, nor is our 'philanthropy' offended by it. But the attainment is due to the mystery of Shakespeare's poetic genius and to the intermittent force of his dramatic power, rather than to his grasp of the foundations of tragedy.

<sup>1</sup> *Od.* I. xxxv.

Broke's Romeus, slaying himself over the apparent corpse of Juliet, greets her spirit:

Oh Juliet, of whom the world unworthy was,  
From which for worldes unworthines thy worthy gost dyd passe!<sup>1</sup>  
He declares his joy to join her in death. Bandello's Juliet follows Romeo 'out of this wretched, miserable life', rejoicing that she could never otherwise have done so in dearer company.<sup>2</sup> Boaistuau, *more suo*, gives her more conventionally decorous phrases. She stabs herself on Romeo's body 'à fin que noz esprits, sortans de ceste lumiere soient eternellement vivans ensemble, au lieu d'eternelle immortalité',<sup>3</sup> as Painter has it, 'that our soules passing from this light, may eternally live together in the place of everlasting joy'.<sup>4</sup> But Shakespeare's poetry is beyond such triteness. Romeo seals his dateless bargain to engrossing death, choosing shipwreck on the dashing rocks to secure peace for his sea-sick weary bark. Juliet has but a word: 'I'll be brief. O happy dagger!' There is need for nothing beyond this. Shakespeare, divining their naked passion, lifts them above the world and out of life by the mere force of it. It is the sheer might of poetry. Dramatically, however, he has subsidiary resources. He has Mercutio and the Nurse.

Mercutio is a lay figure in Porto, a young nobleman called Marcuccio Guercio,<sup>5</sup> whose sole contribution to the story is that he dances with Juliet, and having icy hands in all weathers, he gives Juliet an opening phrase when Romeo, in the course of the dance, holds her with a warmer hand. Shakespeare's source, Broke, needed Mercutio for little more, though his portrait is just a little longer:

A courtier that eche where was highly had in pryce,  
For he was coorteous of his speche and pleasant of devise,  
Even as a Lyon would emong the lambes be bolde,  
Such was emong the bashfull maydes Mercutio to beholde.<sup>6</sup>

This is nearly as much as Broke found in his French source: 'Marcuccio, courtesan fort aimé de tous, lequel à cause de

<sup>1</sup> 188.

<sup>2</sup> 274.

<sup>3</sup> 60.

<sup>4</sup> 274.

<sup>5</sup> 66.

<sup>6</sup> 86.

ses facecies et gentillesses (which Painter weakens to 'by reason of his pleasant and curteous behaviour'<sup>1</sup>) estoit bien receu en toutes compagnies . . . hardy entre les vierges comme un lyon entre les aigneaux.'<sup>2</sup> This goes back to a somewhat longer description which makes Bandello's Mercutio more like Shakespeare's. Marcuccio the Squinter, he is called—'a very pleasant courtier, received well everywhere for his humorous remarks and his amusing ways; for he had always some new trick for making his friends merry, and the merriment was always innocuous.'<sup>3</sup> This is a Mercutio who has the charm, the fancy, the spontaneous sensitiveness, and the gay but sincere sympathy which are traits of Shakespeare's Mercutio. Such a man, if any at all, might have understood the depth of Romeo's love for Juliet. But the camaraderie and the worldly *savoir-faire* of Mercutio give him no inkling of the nature of Romeo's passion. The love of Romeo and Juliet is beyond the ken of their friends; it belongs to a world which is not their world; and so the passing of Romeo and Juliet is not as other deaths are in their impact on our sentiments.

Similarly, too, the Nurse. She is Shakespeare's greatest debt to Broke, in whose poem she plays a curiously unexpected and yet incongruously entertaining part. In Porto, the nurse is a very minor lay-figure: she is a young companion-attendant who had been brought up with Juliet, who regarded her almost as a sister.<sup>4</sup> In Bandello she is equally unimportant, but has become an old attendant who had nursed Juliet.<sup>5</sup> Boaiustau endows her with more

<sup>1</sup> 212.

<sup>2</sup> 35<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> 247: Marcuccio il guercio, che era uomo di corte molto piacevole, e generalmente molto ben visto per i suoi motti festevoli e per le piacevolezze ch'egli sapeva fare; perciocchè sempre aveva alcuna novelluccia per le mani da far ridere la brigata, e troppo volentieri senza danno di nessuno si sollazzava.

<sup>4</sup> 75: 'Una sua fante, che seco allevata s'era, e che quasi come sorella teneva.'

<sup>5</sup> 246: 'Una sua vecchia che nodrita l'aveva', and (251) 'che seco in camera dormiva'.



of the *convenances*. Juliet calls her 'Mère', she sleeps in Juliet's room *et lui servoit de femme d'honneur*.<sup>1</sup> She calls Juliet *ma damoiselle, chère nourriture* (in Painter, 'deare daughter and nursechilde, myne owne deare darling'), she is expert in the literary art of uttering woe, and laments rhetorically when she finds Juliet apparently dead. But the hint Broke took for his portrait comes from her action after the secret wedding. This, in the French version, is Romeo's first visit to Juliet's room; in Bandello, he has been there before the marriage (the later consummation of which Bandello places *al fresco* in a corner of the Capulet garden). In Boaistuau, after the wedding, Romeo comes privily to Juliet's room. They utter proper and literary sentiments to each other until the nurse enters and tells them she has prepared a couch for them.<sup>2</sup> Broke takes this slight hint of her nature brilliantly: the nurse is his one great addition to the legend. She is 'an olde dame' who 'in her youth had nurst Juliet with her mylke'. Juliet confides her love to the nurse, who is at first unsympathetic; but

Wonne at length with promest hyre, she made a solemne vowe,  
To do what she commaundes as handmayd of hir hest.<sup>3</sup>

Going to Romeo to see what can be done, she enters gaily into the planning of a secret wedding. She becomes garrulously reminiscent:

of Juliet's youth began this prating noorse  
And of her present state to make a tedious long discoorse.<sup>4</sup>

But the tedium of it is not apparent in her recorded remarks:

how she gave her sucke in youth, she leaveth not to tell;  
A prety babe (quod she) it was when it was yong;  
Lord, how it could full pretely have prated with its tong.  
A thousand times and more I laid her on my lappe  
And clapt her on the buttocke soft, and kist where I did clappe.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 40.

<sup>2</sup> 42: 'Voilà un camp que ie vous ay dressé (leur mostrant le lit de camp qu'elle avoit appareillé): prenez vos armes et en iouez désormais la vengeance.'

<sup>3</sup> 102.

<sup>4</sup> 103.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

—and so she went on, for

when these beldams sit at ease upon theyr tayle

The day and eke the candle light before theyr talke shall fayle.<sup>1</sup>

As she leaves Romeo, he bribes her with six gold crowns, for which she curtsies with comic obsequiousness. Telling the tale to Juliet, impatient to hear what the plans are, she excites Juliet's irritation by withholding the news to launch out in praise of Romeo. She does not, however, mention the bribe. She babbles on, telling Juliet not to be as foolish as she, the nurse, had been, for she had wasted a whole year of pleasure by not marrying until she was sixteen years old.

This is exactly the sort of woman Shakespeare took for nurse to his Juliet. So Juliet has, for her most intimate domestic companion, a gross worldly creature who talks much of love and never means anything beyond sensuality. Like Romeo's, Juliet's love is completely unintelligible to the people in her familiar circle. To her nurse, love is animal lust. To her father, who has been a 'mouse-hunter' in his time, and to her mother, it is merely a social institution, a worldly arrangement in a very worldly world. This earth, it would seem, has no place for passion like Romeo's and Juliet's. And so, stirred to sympathy by Shakespeare's poetic power, we tolerate, perhaps even approve of their death. At least for the moment.

But tragedy lives not only for its own moment, nor by long suspensions of disbelief. There is the inevitable afterthought and all its obstinate questionings. Our sentiments were but momentarily gratified. And finally our deeper consciousness protests. Shakespeare has but conquered us by a trick: the experiment carries him no nearer to the heart of tragedy. What Dr. Johnson said summarily of all his works was certainly true of *Romeo and Juliet* and of his plays prior to *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *King Lear*: 'in comedy he seems to repose or luxuriate as in a mode of thinking congenial to him. His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct.'

<sup>1</sup> 103.



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